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Gendering the "Black Pacific": African Americans and the U.S. Military Occupation of Japan, 1945-1952

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Introduction

After the end of the Second World War, the "Black Pacific" emerged as a transnational and intercultural site for racial and gender formation through which African Americans negotiated and contested the boundaries of race consciousness, national identity, and notions of masculinity and femininity; this was forged through diasporic encounters with Japanese and other Asian peoples within the specific historical context of the postwar U.S. political, economic, and military engagement in Asia. This paper examines the initial postwar encounters and interactions of African Americans with Japanese citizens during the U.S. military occupation of mainland Japan from 1945 to 1952. It reveals the experience of African American women whose presence has been marginalized and even ignored in the dominant, masculinized narrative of the U.S.-Japanese encounter in occupied Japan, as well as that of African American men--the majority of whom served as members of the U.S. Army. In doing so, this paper focuses not only on the racial but also on the gendered dimension of the formation of a transnational, intercultural subjectivity belonging to African Americans on both sides of the Pacific. African American men and women defined, explored, and enhanced the racial and gendered nature of the sense of justice, power, and identity that prevailed within the boundaries of the privileged national status that they enjoyed over the Japanese as members of the U.S. occupation forces, a status complicated by the racial stigma that they encountered both in the U.S. Army and in Japanese society. The "trans-Pacific interaction" of racial-sexual ideology and practices surrounding black masculinity and femininity was central to the formation of the racial, gendered, sexual, and national subjectivities of African Americans in occupied Japan as well as the discursive formation of African American-Japanese intimacy and marriage in both Japan and the United States.

This analysis is built upon previous historical and interdisciplinary studies on African Diaspora, African American-Japanese relationships, and the U.S. military occupation of Japan. First, it reconsiders the centrality of the "Atlantic" in current transnational and comparative studies of the African Diaspora from a

"Pacific" viewpoint. Sociologist Paul Gilroy is influential for his theoretical formulation of the "Black Atlantic" as a "counterculture of modernity" that challenges the tendency toward nationalist and ethnic absolutism that he finds in both the black and white intellectual, political, and cultural traditions.[1] However, the "Black Atlantic," conceived as an intellectual framework enabling comparative analysis of the historical experience and cultural imagination of peoples of African descent as they moved from slavery to freedom, obscures the geographical and temporal horizons of the African Diaspora and underestimates the extent of its affinities and intersections with other politics of diaspora beyond the Atlantic world.

Next, there is an emerging body of scholarship on the "Black-Asian" relationship that explores the interracial and international encounters, either in material or imaginary terms, between peoples of the African and Asian diaspora across time and space. Most historical studies on the African American-Japanese relationship have investigated how black intellectual and political leaders forged interracial solidarity with the Japanese, or critiqued Japan's imperialist aggression in Asia within the parameters of the black global struggle against white supremacy, as well as the U.S.-Japanese relationship during the first half of the 20th century.[2] The centrality of race and nation as analytical categories in the precedent studies on the prewar African American-Japanese relationship ignored the gender and sexual dynamics of the "trans-Pacific exchanges" between African Americans and the Japanese.

Historians and other researchers of the U.S. military occupation of Japan have examined the social and cultural implications of the racial visibility of African American GIs on the postwar reformation of Japanese racial ideology and practices. The current research on African American-Japanese encounters in occupied Japan focuses mostly on Japanese literary and popular representations of African American male soldiers, the Japanese women who married them, and their mixed-race children.[3] In her pioneering scholarship on issues of race and racism in the occupation, historian Koshiro Yukiko argues that postwar reformation of the U.S.-Japanese relationship depended on "trans-Pacific racisms," or the interaction of the racialist sentiments that both Americans and Japanese traditionally embraced in opposition to each other as well as to other Asians. She suggests that these racisms influenced the policy-making process surrounding issues such as the principle of racial equality in the new Japanese Constitution, immigration and emigration, and miscegenation. As Koshiro indicates, the mutual acceptance of the "existing racial hierarchies of world politics" contributed to the social stigmatization of "African-ness" in the postwar reconciliation between "white conquerors" and the Japanese as "honorary whites."[4] However, Koshiro's theoretical framework of "trans-Pacific racisms," as well as other major scholarship on African Americans in occupied Japan, diminishes the agency of African Americans as major actors in shaping the postwar U.S.-Japanese relationship. How did African American men and women grapple with the terms

of race consciousness, gender convention, national belonging, Asian ethnicity, and sexual practice through personal and discursive encounters with the Japanese on both sides of the Pacific, within the overlapping historical contexts of the U.S. military occupation of Japan, African American-Japanese relationships, and major changes in racial and sexual dynamics in U.S. and Japanese societies after World War II?

I. Privileged National Status of African Americans as "Occupiers"

Despite their second-class status in the U.S., the postwar encounters between African Americans and the Japanese were principally established upon the highly asymmetrical power relationship that exists between "occupiers" and the "occupied." African American men and women projected in gender-specific ways the "victorious" American attitude in their interactions with Japanese civilians. African American soldiers, like white GIs, asserted and performed the "victorious" American masculinity with respect to Japanese women and men within the context of their enhanced national status as members of the U.S. occupation forces, though within the parameters of the pervasive racism practiced in the U.S. Army. Charles Bussey, who was stationed at Camp Majestic in Gifu from May through July 1950 as commander of the 77th Engineer Combat Company, described the activities of many American GIs in occupied Japan:

> Military duty in Japan as part of the U.S. Army of Occupation was comfortable and leisurely. Good living was the order of the day. Occupation meant occupying the best of Japanese commercial, residential, and recreational facilities, holding a glass in one hand and a Japanese girlfriend, or *moosimae,* in the other, and how much hell one could raise. Single soldiers concentrated on the good life with lovely Japanese girls, and married soldiers concentrated on opulent living with families, if they were present, with female servants, who were omnipresent. The only fighting the U.S. soldiers engaged in was negotiating a price for a single night's favor, for professional services on a month-by-month basis, or for Noritake china and Mikimoto pearls.[5]

Although African American GIs are not singled out here, Bussey suggested that U.S. occupation troops, regardless of race, were conferred upon the enhanced national status to pursue comfortable lives, enjoy leisure activities, and hire Japanese servants, and took full advantage of the "victor's" prerogatives. He further identified the patriarchal and sexual privileges that U.S. soldiers assumed in their relations with Japanese women within the specific "militarized" context of the gendered interaction between GIs and native women under the occupation. As feminist political scientist Cynthia Enloe explains, the gendered process of "militarization" in international politics is constructed on the control of women and the manipulations of ideas about femininity and masculinity by the military and

civilians.[6]

Some African American GIs took Japanese women as girlfriends or wives within racial and sexual boundaries for GI interracial intimacy in both the U.S. and Japanese contexts. The idealized representation of Japanese femininity in U.S. orientalist discourse during the early Cold War period contributed to the formation of U.S. soldiers' patriarchal attitudes and approaches in their dealings with Japanese women. African American soldiers, like white GIs, expressed their admiration for "submissive" and "subservient" Japanese women as exemplars of American womanhood. The rank-specific enforcement of the SCAP's antifraternization policies in some black units created more opportunities for African American GIs in the lower ranks to pursue intimate relationships with local women. Instances of enlisted men and noncommissioned officers fraternizing with Japanese women were typically tolerated or ignored in the 24th Infantry Regiment at Camp Gifu, while antifraternization orders were strictly enforced for commissioned officers, whether they were black or white. Furthermore, the interracial romances between black GIs and Japanese women attracted some critical attention of African American women on both sides of the Pacific.[7]

Interracial sexual relations took place, and the "militarized" prostitution became another site of sexual contact and social relations between American GIs and Japanese women. Sexual intercourse with prostitutes became a means of measuring masculine achievement and promoting homosocial bonds among male soldiers in the U.S. occupation forces. The hegemonic discourse of "victorious" heterosexual masculinity in the military, combined with the dominant Western orientalist discourse of alleged Asian female promiscuity, produced their misogynous depreciation of defeated women as sexual objects or whores. At the same time, contracting a venereal disease (VD) could result in severe punishment and damage to the sense of honor and manhood, particularly among African American soldiers. The commanders of the 24th Infantry Regiment, who were always apprehensive about the unit's prominent VD rate within the 25th Infantry Division, punished their servicemen more severely for contracting VD than for many other minor offenses. Genital inspections carried out by the 24th Infantry, which meant bending over with their pants around their ankles in an open parade field, humiliated and violated the masculinity of African American GIs through the performance of the sexual objectification of their bodies by white doctors.[8]

Despite their racial and gender subordination in the communities of American nationals, African American women were entitled to various political prerogatives and economic privileges with respect to Japanese civilians by claiming their American citizenship. Their daily encounters with the Japanese were crucial for African American women to reconsolidate their national identity, recognizing their own political power and status as "American occupiers." They saw Japanese workers, who were serving American personnel as maids, doormen, elevator girls, drivers, and waitresses, show respect to Americans, regardless of race and gender, with their customary gestures. Nan Watson, a Department of

Army civilian who had returned to Japan from the U.S. after a month of vacation in 1950, experienced a "feeling of potency" when she met a Japanese doorman at an office building who opened the door to her, grinning and bowing. Watson's friend Lisa shared a similar experience by claiming, "In America we are just women, over here we each are very definite individuals." By enjoying their privileged national status over the Japanese, African American women experienced an enhanced sense of racial and gendered "respect" that was unattainable in their own country.[9]

Their access to a luxurious social life, and the release of their responsibility from domestic service to Japanese maids in particular, encouraged African American women to explore alternative race, class, and gender identities within the possibilities of newly attained social and economic status in Japan. African American women, some of whom had experience as domestic workers in the U.S., enjoyed their privileged position by employing Japanese women and men to serve them in various menial jobs. Civilian African American women who stayed at luxurious hotels were relieved of household chores by the domestic services of Japanese maids who took care of cleaning rooms, making beds, and doing laundry for them. Maid service was also available for married African American women. Some black wives took advantage of their economic opportunity to hire Japanese maids by advancing their educational and professional careers and participating in community service around the U.S. bases.[10]

There were, however, some ambivalent feelings among the African American women who were suddenly placed in the position of being served by Japanese maids. Some African American women revealed their condescending attitudes toward Japanese maids because of their complex feelings stemming from their own experiences as domestic workers in America. Other black women were puzzled at suddenly finding themselves in the position of hiring a maid in Japan. Sylvia Rock, a Red Cross worker, battled her Japanese maid over the details of what domestic services she expected from her for the first few weeks of her stay in a hotel in Tokyo. Rock frankly confessed her embarrassment about possessing a maid: "I was embarrassed to have another human being doing the things for me that I was perfectly capable of doing for my self… I did not treat them as if they were less than human. I did not try to build up my own ego at the expense of theirs." She was also surprised to find that the menial jobs, including janitors, waitresses, chauffeurs, as well as maids, were exclusively performed by the Japanese civilians, most of whom were university students or graduates. Reflecting the history of racial and gender exploitation of black labor in the U.S., the African American women, who were placed in privileged positions of receiving, rather than performing, menial services for the first time in their lives, were annoyed by the power disparities that were clearly manifested in human relations in occupied Japan. The collective experiences and memories of black domestic workers in the U.S. armed some African American women with a heightened racial and gender consciousness and made them more sensitive to the

domestic service of Japanese maids than African American men and white Americans.[11]

II. Negotiating Race and Culture in the Defeated "Nonwhite Nation"

The overseas military experience in occupied Japan, the defeated "nonwhite nation" that African Americans had admired as their racial ally before WWII, encouraged African American men and women to reconfigure their racial identity beyond the domestic context of racial oppression and discrimination found in the U.S. From Japan's victory over Russia in 1905, the rise of the Japanese empire in the white-dominated world of international politics attracted the special attention of the African American political and intellectual leaders, "black internationalists," who attempted to forge cross-national solidarity among nonwhites in their antiracist, anti-imperialist struggle. Among African American intellectuals, W. E. B. Du Bois was the foremost pro-Japanese advocate during the interwar years, defending Japanese imperialism consistently as a racial struggle to protect Asia from Western imperialist aggression. After Japan's attack on Pearl Harbor in December 1941, the patriotic call for support of the American war effort against Japan replaced the pro-Japanese discourse of prewar black internationalism in the African American struggle for "double victory" over fascism abroad and racism at home during WWII. Although many black leaders and journalists encouraged African Americans to rally to defend the country against Japan, the militant, pro-Japanese sentiment and organizational activities persisted among some African Americans who became targets of surveillance by the FBI. As hostilities ended with Japan's unconditional surrender to the Allies in August 1945, the black press began to publicly identify the Japanese as "colored" again, especially in the coverage of the atomic bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki and the U.S. occupation of Japan. But the defeated Japanese were no longer seen as the leaders of "colored peoples" in the eyes of most African Americans.[12]

In occupied Japan, African American soldiers were forced to revisit the racial ideology and practices in the U.S. from broader racial, cultural, and international perspectives. Some African American GIs observed that racial prejudice sometimes manifested itself in the Japanese attitude toward people of African descent. Charles Bussey believed that racial attitudes found on both sides of the Pacific interacted in Japan, particularly when the Japanese, who had traditionally discriminated against other racial groups in Asia, encountered the antiblack racism of white GIs. Other black GIs confirmed that Japanese people were learning the American way of racism through their daily exposure to white GIs' racist attitudes and treatment of African Americans. Despite the existence of racial prejudice against them on the part of the Japanese people, African American soldiers generally held a positive view of the nature of their relations with the local communities at Gifu. African Americans experienced greater social acceptance and enjoyed a relative absence of racist incidents in their diverse

interactions with the Japanese people. Some black soldiers believed that they were more sympathetic to the Japanese and got along better with them than white GIs in the "tri-racial" dynamics of social interaction in occupied Japan. Others were more conscious of the asymmetrical international power relationship that existed in postwar African American-Japanese encounters. In addition, some African American soldiers reconsolidated their sense of "African-ness" through their daily exchanges with Japanese children, who showed unguardedly their curiosity about black GIs' skin-colors than did their adults counterparts.[13]

African American women became more conscious of their racial differences, and renegotiated their racial self-perception through their everyday encounters with Japanese citizens. Indeed, many Japanese showed a special interest in African American women who were, after all, less visible than African American men due to their small numbers in the racial and gender composition of the U.S. occupation troops. Sylvia Rock often felt exposed to the curious gazes of Japanese people who, she suspected, saw the "first really brown American in Red Cross uniform" on the street. She remarked: "When I walked down the street I would be surrounded by crowds of people who would gingerly touch me to feel my skin, my hair, and my clothes. People turned around while driving to watch me on the street. I have never felt so conspicuous in all my life." Unexpectedly, Rock discovered in Japan the racial similarities between blacks and Asians as a member of the group of darker races. Rock was embarrassed to find that she was mistaken for a Korean by Japanese people, as she was sometimes asked if she was American or Korean. This intriguing question of racial identification posed by the Japanese based on their observation of her skin color was comprehensible to Rock, because she herself identified the Koreans as a "bit darker and taller than the Japanese." Moreover, she felt a sense of interracial sisterhood, or a gendered racial affinity, toward some young Japanese women in the clubs because of their appearance as well as their appreciation of African American culture. Observing the Japanese girls who were dancing in the black club in Yokohama, Rock stated that some of them were "rather brown, some had their hair cut short, and almost all could 'bop' better than many of us in the States." Her encounters with the Japanese, and Japanese girls in particular, gave Rock the opportunity to reconfigure her racial and gender identities in terms of the broader racial dynamics of the international world.[14]

The international and intercultural exchanges that African American men and women experienced in Japan further raised their consciousness about racial and cultural identities, and provided them with expanded perspectives on the problems of race and racism found in the U.S. Having grown up in a sharecropper's family in rural Arkansas in the 1930s, Ivory Perry decided to join the U.S. Army in November 1948, basically to get out of his home state and "see the world." After eight weeks of basic training at Fort Knox, Kentucky, Perry was assigned to the communications section of the 24th Infantry Regiment and stationed at Camp Gifu until he was sent to the front lines in the Korean War in

July 1950. He was very positive about the Japanese treatment of African American GIs. Perry was impressed in his interactions with students and professors from Japanese universities who not only spoke English, but also were knowledgeable about the U.S. racial situation. Moreover, Perry developed an acute appreciation of the cultural contingency of racial ideology and racialized social practices, and he nurtured a multiracial, multicultural worldview cultivated through his personal experiences with the Japanese. As historian and biographer George Lipsitz notes, Perry learned from the Japanese that "differences in skin color did not automatically have to mean prejudice and hatred. As he learned more about Japanese customs and beliefs, he came to feel that all human beings had the same basic desires." Through their everyday interactions with Japanese citizens, Perry and other African American GIs expanded their sense of "the ways of the world," and reformulated their responses to understandings of race, white supremacy, Japanese belligerence, and interracial relations beyond the U.S. domestic context.[15]

Some African American women expanded their worldview through their cultural, intellectual and labor exchanges with Japanese citizens. Nan Watson found a particular social gathering at the Japanese YWCA to be "highly entertaining and profitable," where she mingled and conversed with Japanese students over coffee and dancing. On this occasion, a serious discussion of various topics including religion, movies, FBI, and the mutual perception of their countries was held among African Americans and young Japanese students. It served as an illuminating experience for her to "become acquainted with the country, the people and their customs." Some black women, like civilian personnel Elvira Turner, expanded her cultural horizon by developing the level of her appreciation of the Japanese culture and lifestyle as well as her personal relationships with Japanese friends, when she was invited by them to house parties. Daisy Tibbs, who visited Japan as a member of the Quaker-oriented project to construct the "House of Hiroshima," mingled actively among the local Japanese people during her work hours and leisure time. An *Ebony* magazine article reported in January 1950 that Tibbs "fitted well into the house-building routine and won the hearts of Japanese in Hiroshima, many of whom had never before seen a black girl." These African American women contributed to the development of mutual understanding and respect between Americans and the Japanese at the grass-roots level as "personal ambassadors" to Japan.[16]

III. Resisting Racism and Sexism within the U.S. Occupation Forces

African American men and women continued being segregated and discriminated against within the U.S. Army, while they held considerable power and prerogative vis-à-vis Japanese citizens as members of the U.S. occupation forces. Even after President Harry S. Truman issued in July 1948 Executive Order # 9981 to declare officially the desegregation of the U.S. Armed Forces, black

units continued to exist in the 8th U.S. Army until they were disbanded and integrated into white units for the military and combat exigencies in the midst of the Korean War. A substantial number of African Americans were appointed as commissioned officers in the 24th Infantry Regiment in the postwar U.S. military experiment toward integration. The proportion of black officers in the 24th Infantry ranged from 52 percent in June 1947 to 40 percent in March 1949. However, these African American officers faced discrimination in the process of their placement and promotion within the regiment, while the non-commissioned officers (NCOs) were able to advance in their careers without any competition from whites. They were generally excluded from appointment to positions supervising or commanding white troops, and rarely advanced to the ranks above the company-level positions, which limited some black lieutenants and captains to commands at the platoon and company levels only.[17] In addition, African American GIs who experienced few interracial interactions with white troops at Camp Gifu got involved in some serious racial conflicts with white American GIs, who intimidated and humiliated them with racist acts and remarks, during their duty in such metropolitan areas as Tokyo and Yokohama.[18]

African American soldiers in the 24th Infantry Regiment transformed the segregated and discriminatory conditions of their garrison life at Camp Gifu in various ways that promoted their racial and gendered empowerment. African American officers took advantage of opportunities to develop leadership skills and fostered a sense of camaraderie among black GIs across ranks. Further, African American soldiers created their own space for forging racial, cultural, and spiritual ties among themselves within the segregated U.S. Army by establishing black community institutions such as their own newspaper and church and developing a new world of black music. For African American troops who had fewer opportunities than white troops to demonstrate their combat efficiency in training because of prejudice among high commanders, athletic prowess and marching performance became major sources of honor from which they could achieve racial and masculine empowerment within the U.S. Army. Moreover, the relative tolerance toward homosexuality within the 24th Infantry allowed some African American gay GIs to pursue their sexual desires and construct their sexual identities through encounters with fellow gay soldiers within the barracks.[19]

African American military women suffered from institutional racism within the U.S. Army Nurse Corps, and resisted it by soliciting trans-Pacific legal assistance from a civil rights organization in the U.S. as well as exchanging information through the intraracial professional network of black army nurses in Japan. On June 6, 1949, Lt. Millie S. Hooks, who served as one of two African American nurses in the 128th Station Hospital in Yokohama, suddenly received a notice from the hospital commander requesting her "separation" from the Army Nurse Corps. Hooks suspected that this request was related to prejudicial judgment on the part of Capt. Johnson, her supervisor, whom she insisted had reported her "disqualifying insufficiency" because of her personal antagonism.

She filed a formal complaint with the Inspector General of the HQ of the 8th Army and an additional formal request for retention in service with the Adjutant General in Washington, D.C. In the investigation that was ordered in response to her complaint, the high commanders of the 8th Army interrogated Hooks as if she was a racial instigator among African American nurses, who resisted being transferred to the 128th as a replacement for Hooks, instead of examining the actual conditions of discrimination there. As a result of the investigation, Hooks was returned to the U.S. as "surplus" and discharged under "honorable" conditions on July 30. It is worth noting that Hooks solicited legal advice from the NAACP Legal Defense and Education Fund in New York about her charge of discrimination in the U.S. Army Nurse Corps in Japan. Forging diasporic racial and gender consciousness in their battle against the U.S. military authorities in Japan and in Washington, D.C., Hooks and other black army nurses linked across the Pacific their resistance against discrimination in Japan to the larger civil rights activism growing in the U.S.[20]

African American women also experienced "masculinist" backlash from African American soldiers against their enhanced sense of gender consciousness in Japan within the boundaries of the traditional black patriarchy and the conservative gender and sexual norms in American society during the early Cold War period. The civilian African American women in the Department of the Army became the major target of gender backlash from African American GIs, especially for their higher rank than most black enlisted men enjoyed within the racialized class hierarchies of the U.S. Army. They blamed elite civilian black women, who were claiming their sense of superiority and class privilege with respect to black enlisted men, for violating the masculine pride and patriarchal privilege of black GIs, whose chances for promotion were limited due to the persistence of racial discrimination within the U.S. Army. African American soldiers further pathologized black single women, either civilian or military, who were engaged in the "unfeminine" U.S. military project of occupation in peace time, as having deviated from the traditional gender roles and sexual standard during that period. They employed the influential U.S. orientalist representation of "submissive" Japanese women as exemplars of domestic womanhood to discipline African American women, who were exploring alternative gender identities and roles within the possibilities of political privilege, improved economic conditions, and elevated social status in Japan. In response, some African American women confronted charges of gender deviancy by targeting Japanese female passivity as well as the patriarchal attitudes of African American men who associated with Japanese women in defense of their womanhood. Furthermore, some African American WACs criticized the sexual behavior of African American male GIs who were engaged in "militarized" prostitution in Japan.[21]

IV. Interracial Marriage between African American GIs and Japanese Women

Some African American soldiers developed their intimate relationships with Japanese women into marriage and childbearing across racial and national boundaries, and confronted the institutional, organizational, and ideological barriers against interracial intimacy and sexuality in both Japan and the U.S. African American GIs wishing to marry Japanese women first had to deal with the strong opposition that usually came from the woman's family members. Japanese people indicted the women who married U.S. troops, whether black or white, as disgrace to the nation by associating them with prostitutes during the occupation period. Given the racist attitudes toward African-descended people, Japanese women who married black GIs faced an even greater stigma than those who married white GIs. Next, U.S. naturalization and immigration laws that traditionally defined people of Asian descent as "aliens" ineligible for U.S. citizenship served to discourage some American GIs from pursuing "official approval" for their marriage. The Immigration Act of 1924 specifically barred the immigration of "Japanese war brides" to the U.S. as citizens or permanent residents. Furthermore, African American soldiers often interpreted the disapproval of their interracial marriage, either from the military or civilians, as a manifestation of prejudice against black male sexuality. Some black GIs suspected that high commanders were possibly involved in the organizational interference with the interracial marriage of African American GIs within the U.S. Army.[22]

African American soldiers attempted to get their nuptials approved by the U.S. consul within the shifting legal boundaries of U.S. immigration policies toward Japanese war brides. The temporary relaxation in U.S. immigration laws, which permitted entrance into the U.S. for Japanese brides and their dependents, setting aside the 1924 Immigration Act's racial restrictions, included the amendment to the War Brides Act of 1945 in 1947 (Public Law 213), called the "Japanese War Brides Act," and its extension in 1950 (Public Law 717). Some soldiers in the 24th Infantry Regiment sought support from their black senior officers to mount the institutional barriers against their proposed marriages. Lieut. Col. Harry Lofton, one of the few black commanding officers in the 24th Infantry, and Chaplain Cap. Sullus B. Washington played crucial roles in the submission of a large number of applications for marriage submitted by African American GIs under Public Law 717. Lofton and Washington strongly supported the requests for marriage permission from their enlisted men and junior officers because of their deep concern over the welfare of mixed-race babies left in Japan. Lofton had observed personally the miserable conditions for many Japanese mothers, who received no financial assistance due to "neglect" or "desertion" by American GIs. In addition, some African American GIs planned to establish a charitable institution in Japan for the mixed-race children fathered and deserted

by American GIs. Theodore R. Washington of the 567th Engineer Service Company wrote to NAACP Executive Secretary Walter White, seeking legal assistance for his plan to create such an institution in Gifu modeled it after a nursery home in Europe.[23]

On the American side, African Americans invested in the dominant U.S. Orientalist discourse of U.S.-Asian integration, which historian Christina Klein calls "Cold War Orientalism," in racialized and gendered ways to reconstitute the image of the Japanese brides of black GIs, or the women of the former "enemy nation," as new members of their racial and national communities in the U.S., within the boundaries of the postwar black politics of interracial marriage, the cultures of domestic "containment," and anti-Communism in the U.S. foreign relations during the early Cold War period. The traditional black politics of interracial intimacy which operated within the central nexus of black-white sexual relations shaped how African Americans responded to black-Japanese marriages. Some African American women, like Carey Noaldin, a *Chicago Defender* reader from Philadelphia, celebrated black-Japanese couples as symbol of the mutual understanding between African Americans and the people of Japanese descent beyond wartime hostilities. She considered black-Japanese marriage as less controversial because the "color perspective" was subordinated in the intermarriage between the groups of "dark people."[24] Nannie Burroughs, the president of the Women's Auxiliary of the National Baptist Convention, expressed in 1950 her total approval of black-Japanese intermarriage:

> What would be the objection? It's up to the couple; marriage is a personal matter. If it is not forbidden by law in Japan, and the soldiers entered the Army without knowledge of any restrictions on marriages of this kind, then the question should not be raised at all. The world's on fire…better that that fire be put out first; then the race question will settle itself.[25]

Burroughs' remark about black-Japanese intermarriage is noteworthy, because she was more critical of black-white interracial marriage as a form of assimilation into the dominant white American society and a lack of racial pride, reflecting a representative view of interracial marriage among middle-class African Americans. She might not consider the African American GIs who married Japanese women as racial betrayal, because their interracial marriage was less explosive and "disrespectable" than black-white one in light of the U.S. history of interracial sexuality, and did not promise them upward social mobility within the racial hierarchies in the contemporary white-dominant American society.[26]

The presence of Japanese war brides in their communities attracted special attention of African American women during the early 1950s. In response to the *Ebony* magazine article that reported in January 1953 on the social isolation of Japanese brides in American society, some African American women expressed their sympathy toward their loneliness and even suggested making friends with them as pen pals. Gladys Durham, a reader from Augusta, Georgia wrote as her

advice to the Japanese brides: "Keep your chin up and face this thing bravely for we often are shunned by in-laws and friends of our husbands and *we are of the same race* (my italics)." Durham expressed her sincere acceptance of the racial membership of Japanese brides in black communities as wives of African American men, with whom she found commonality in terms of their racial and gendered experience in the U.S. Moreover, some African American women praised the Japanese brides' devotion to their black husbands as an exemplar of womanhood that black wives, too, could emulate in their marriage. Janie C. Butts, an *Ebony* reader from Philadelphia claimed: "I am a Negro woman myself, and I have a deep feeling of admiration for these women who have the spirit and courage to defy the world in letting it know of their deep love and devotion they have for their husbands." The controversy on "submissive" Japanese brides functioned as a discursive arena for African American women to reinforce and reconfigure their gender identity and roles within the boundaries of the "domestic" imperatives and the U.S.-Japanese integration during the early Cold War period.[27]

Conclusion

In the postwar reformation of the U.S.-Japanese relationship during the occupation, African Americans developed a racial and gendered sense of justice, power, and identity through personal and discursive encounters with Japanese citizens on both sides of the Pacific, even though this process was still stifled by racial stigmas and discriminatory practices that they faced within the U.S. Army and in American society at large as well as the racialist sentiments that marred Japanese society. Through their investment in the transnational and intercultural formation of the "Black Pacific," African American men and women navigated the terms of military occupation and interracial and international relations as well as the racial-sexual politics of intimacy, marriage, and domesticity in pursuit of their own racial and gendered empowerment. Further, the "Black Pacific" functioned as a transnational and intercultural framework of identity contestation through which African American men and women explored alternative identities beyond the nationalist dichotomy between "victors" and the "defeated" and the influential nexus of race, nation, and empire in prewar discourses of "Black-Japanese solidarity."

The postwar racial activism on the stateside encouraged African Americans in occupied Japan to push the boundaries of power, justice, and rights in their trans-Pacific struggle for racial equality. Some African American men and women attempted to connect their struggle for racial, gender, and economic justice not only for themselves, but also for mixed-race children and their Japanese mothers to the on-going campaigns for black civil rights in the U.S. through their trans-Pacific correspondence with the NAACP. Moreover, some African American GIs who had gained a broadened sense of the world from their military

experience in Japan and other non-U.S. deployments between World War II and the Korean War became major actors in the postwar black straggle for equal rights.[28] The personal freedom that Ivory Perry of the 24th Infantry Regiment experienced in Japan made him more keenly aware of the pervasive racism within the U.S. Army, which was charged with bringing "democracy to Japan." After he returned to the U.S. with a heightened sense of racial justice, Perry played central roles in grassroots civil rights activism and community organizing around the issues of housing, employment, and health care in St. Louis and other cities from the 1950s through the 1980s. Faced with the yawning gap between what they had experienced in Japan and the cruel realities of racial injustice and oppression that they encountered in their everyday civilian life in the U.S., many African American veterans, like Perry, joined the Civil Rights Movement with a heightened sense of racial justice and masculine militancy, rooted in their military service in Japan.[29]

Notes

1. Paul Gilroy, *The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double Consciousness* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1993).
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4. Koshiro, *Trans-Pacific Racisms and the U.S. Occupation of Japan.*
5. Charles M. Bussey, *Firefight at Yechon: Courage and Racism in the Korean War* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1991), 41-42.
6. Yasuhiro Okada, "Race, Masculinity, and Military Occupation: African American Soldiers' Encounters with the Japanese at Camp Gifu, 1947-1951," *The Journal of African American History* 96 (Spring 2011), 187-188; Cynthia Enloe, *Bananas, Beaches, and Bases: Making Feminist Sense of International Politics,* Rev. ed. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001); and *Maneuvers: The International Politics of Militarizing Women's Lives* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000).
7. Okada, "Race, Masculinity, and Military Occupation," 187-190.
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9. Yasuhiro Okada, "Negotiating Race and Womanhood across the Pacific: African American Women in Japan under U.S. Military Occupation, 1945-1952," *Black Women, Gender & Families* 6 (Spring 2012, forthcoming); Nan Watson, "Letter from Japan," *Negro Digest,* July 1950, 47 ("In America").
10. Okada, "Negotiating Race and Womanhood across the Pacific."
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12. Okada, "Race, Masculinity, and Military Occupation," 183-184.
13. Ibid., 184-185.
14. Okada, "Negotiating Race and Womanhood across the Pacific"; Rock, "Nippon Girls Look Like Americans" ("When I walked down").
15. Okada, "Race, Masculinity, and Military Occupation," 185; George Lipsitz, *A Life in the Struggle: Ivory Perry and the Culture of Oppression,* Rev. ed. (Philadelphia, PA, 1995), 40 ("differences in skin color").
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18. Yasuhiro Okada, "Amerika kokujin butai wo meguru jinshu to jendā no poritikusu: campu gifu ni chūryū no dai 24 hohei rentai wo chūsin ni" [Race, Gender, and African American Units in Japan under U.S. Military Occupation: Focusing on the 24th Infantry Regiment Stationed at Camp Gifu], *Kinjo Gakuin Daigaku Ronshu: Studies in Social Sciences* 7 (March 2011), 83-84.

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20. Okada, "Negotiating Race and Womanhood across the Pacific."
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22. Okada, "Race, Masculinity, and Military Occupation," 191-196.
23. Ibid.
24. Okada, "Cold War Black Orientalism," 60-67; Christina Klein, *Cold War Orientalism: Asia in the Middlebrow Imagination, 1945-1961* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003).
25. "Most American Women Say: 'Let GIs Wed Japanese Girls,'" *Pittsburgh Courier,* 18 November 1950.
26. Okada, "Cold War Black Orientalism," 62-63.
27. Ibid., 64-67; Letters to the editor, *Ebony,* April 1953, 9 ("Keep your chin up"); Letters to the editor, *Ebony,* March 1953, 7 ("I am a Negro woman").
28. Maria Höhn and Martin Kimke, *A Breath of Freedom: The Civil Rights Struggle, African American GIs, and Germany* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010); Robert F. Jefferson, *Fighting for Hope: African American Troops of the 93rd Infantry Division in World War II and Postwar America* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2008); Steve Estes, *I Am a Man!: Race, Manhood, and the Civil Rights Movement* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2005), chap. 1; James Forman, *The Making of Black Revolutionaries* (1972; repr., Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1985); Nelson Peery, *Black Fire: The Making of an American Revolutionary* (New York: New Press, 1995).
29. Okada, "Race, Masculinity, and Military Occupation," 196-197.